SYNOPSIS

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TITLE:

THE CONCEPT OF SELF: JEAN-PAUL SARTRE AND RABINDRANATH TAGORE

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The fundamental truth of existentialist's philosophy rests on human beings who are struggling to sustain their existence. The existentialists believe that the truth of human existence has its relevance only in this world. The existence of a human being is the summation of so many other people, the flora and other objects. There hardly exists any other thing that controls human existence.

First renowned so-called existentialist Soren Kierkegaard (1889-1969) in his book "The Sickness unto Death", he defines 'self' (Selv) as "a relation which relates to itself" (Kierkegaard 2004: 43). Since this formulation is rather obscure, it would be helpful to see how Kierkegaard distinguishes 'self' from 'human being'. According to Kierkegaard, 'human being' is a synthesis which is "a relation between two [factors]"2 (ibid.), or alternatively it is defined as the relation of two factors which he calls 'synthesis'. One can here recognize the difference in the way Kierkegaard understands the human being and the self. A relation between two factors (human being) is not yet a relation which relates to itself (self); Kierkegaard thus suggests from this that "a human being is not yet a self" (ibid.). This may sound quite counter-intuitive as most of us who are human beings also consider ourselves a self, but his point is that a human being qualifies as a self in varying degrees. Human being as a synthesis is constituted by psyche and body (Kierkegaard 1980: 85), but self is marked by the third factor which Kierkegaard calls 'spirit'. In this way, a positive relation which relates to itself is united by the third factor, spirit; on the other hand, a negative relation which "the two relate to the relation, and in the relation to that relation" (Kierkegaard 2004: 43) either lacks or has very little contribution made by this spirit.

On the other hand, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) analysed Dasein is "related to its being, it is entrusted to its own being". In other words, Dasein is a being whose existence is always at stake. This kind of self-relationship is clearly expressed in the well-known difference between authenticity and inauthenticity. As pointed out in Being and Time, we are in front of two modes of existential self-fulfillment: one inauthentic, expressed as "one-self" (Man-Selbst), and another authentic, expressed as "genuine self" (eigentliches Selbst). In fact, Dasein already lives in the oscillation between inauthenticity and authenticity; its existence unfolds in this

intermediate space. No wonder that, in the lectures Basic Problems of Phenomenology (1927), Heidegger insists that the real philosophical problem is the unity of the concept of being.

Now if I look on Karl Jaspers writings, Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) begins from the existential starting-point: "everything essentially real is for only by virtue of the fact that I am I myself". My existence is the "arena" for my self-realization. Existenz (a term he consciously borrows from Kierkegaard, who himself found it in Schelling, who opposed Existenz to the Hegelian Idea) refers to "possible" individual existence in terms of its freedom and willing. For Jaspers, the very essence of Existenz is its intentional tending to the other, that is to say, its transcendence. Jaspers writes: Just as I do not exist without the world, I am not myself without transcendence. . . .i stand before transcendence, which does not occur to me as existing in the world of phenomenal things but speaks to me as possible-speaks to me in the voice of whatever exists, and most decidedly in that of my self-being. The transcendence before which I stand is the measure of my own depth.

After Karl Jaspers, Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) has explained the truth of 'myself' through this assumption. That the fundamental propositions of existentialism have been illustrated in his book "Being and Nothingness" is accepted to all. 'I exist' is the main resolution of human existence. A man also knows about other people having higher consciousness in this world. Sartre speaks like a pragmatic man though human consciousness is prime here. The existentialists have treated consciousness and the inanimate world with equal importance taking into account the fact that the inanimate world hardly influences consciousness. The process of self exploration depends on certain factors like the environment in which he grows up and his physical and psychological needs. Sartre calls it 'Facticity'. He writes in this regards:

'……man seems "to be made" by climate and the earth, race and class, Language, the history of the collectivity of which he is a part, heredity, the individual circumstances of his childhood, acquired habits, the great and small events of his life.' (p. 482, 'Being and Doing : Freedom', 'Being and Nothingness', Methuen and Co. LTD. 1972 London)

The self which emerges out from my efforts is the 'free man' according to Sartre. But this is not the fact always that every work leads to independence and Sartre himself has acknowledged this. He said human beings do not understand their own self in this world and

often times do not implement their own dispositions in to their work properly. They wrap themselves up and this cover is termed as ‘Bad Faith’ by Sartre.

After Sartre,

Now, above those regards, If, I concerned on Rabindranath Tagore, he wrote:

Whose robe do I discover spread out in the moon light,
Whose eye silent blue sky?
Whose face do I discover veiled in sunlight,
Whose feet on the velvety bed of grass?
Whose touch indeed in the scent of the flowers
Exhilarating mind and body,
Twists round the heart likr a creeper?

[qtd in Hiranmaya Banerjee, p. 51]

It is by colours of my consciousness
That the emerald is green,
The ruby is red
I opened my eyes upon the sky,
And light kindled
From east to west……

This is my pride,
Pride on behalf of all humanity.
Human pride is the canvas
For the divine artificer’s cosmic art.

[Tr. Sukanta Chaudheri, p.300]

In the circumstantial interplay of actions almost every man has to turn towards his very own self. He wants to explain that particular version of truth which he gains through his experience of the world. But not everybody is equipped with that kind of faculty. Only an artist, a philosopher or a literary genius can do so. The existentialist philosophers have explained

existentialism by taking human existence as its yardstick. The main feature of their explanation lies not in some general independent theory about human beings. The whole existence of human beings is explained in terms of the deliberate actions performed by a man in his life. What I have perceived from their explanation is that self realization is the supreme level of this consciousness. They looked upon a man from various points of view taking human psyche in their consideration. They differ from the psychologists to some extent though they too consider human mind as the prime thing. The psychologists have given reasons for specific psychological behaviors as also the remedy of those behaviors but have not connected the whole human existence with that. They did not also make any comment about the special significance of mind-behavior or what a man things about truth. This discussion has given the scope for the inculcation of so many new thoughts.

Human freedom is not barred by the physical conditions. Rabindranath in his 'Religion of Man' says in this respect that a man comes in this world with 'Biological existence' and develops his creative self as also accomplishes his own plan, project, devices to lead his life. The quotient of this work - accomplishment is limitless and infinite. I have to be what I am not' is the source of my limitless existential consciousness. Sartre calls it the consciousness of 'Nothingness'.

Rabindranath has accepted this existence which is free from bodily existence. A man wants to express his self going beyond the physical conditions and a perception of infinite existence is the source of it. He also says in this regards :

> 'Prothome dekhichi ami achi, ami satyi. Tarpor dekhichi zetuku ekhoni achi, eitukutei ami sesh noi. Za ami hobo, za akhono hoini tao amar modhye ache. Take dhorte pari ne, chute pari ne, kintu ta ekoti rohosymoy podarrthorupe amar modhye royeche. Eke ami boli shokti…'(p.263-64, R.B.R, 12sh khando, P.B.sarkar, 1961)

Those who have considered the free self of human being as the highest have also acknowledged the world of value in the light of human acceptance and rejections. The world is laden with hue, humor, rhythm and beauty. When a man will be able to perceive this with the humanistic sentiments he has, these components of the world will be his agents in accomplishing

his works. Therefore we can say the complete reflection of a man lies in the union of his contemplation and accomplishment.

> "I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy". –Tagore.

The philosophy of Tagore, as he presents in his work "Sadhana", thus, is a comprehensive one that at once includes the idea of a happy reconcilement between service and renunciation, action and seclusion, between self and soul, the finite and the infinite, the individual and the world. As S. Radhakrishnan rightly says, Tagore gives an eloquent expression to his thirst for social betterment. Man as a member of society has to offer himself entirely and exhaustively to the service of one's fellows (The Philosophy 79-80). The soul filled with the infinite love spends itself in the service of man, which otherwise would be an abstract barren negative. To quote Radhakrishnan:

> "The philosophy of Rabindranath is an absolute idealism of the concrete type… Rabindranath's is a wholeness of vision, which cannot tolerate absolute divisions between body and mind, matter and life, individual and society, community and nation, empire and the world…"(The Philosophy 177)

Tagore believes in the divinity of man. Man is regarded by his as a finite-infinite being. He classified human beings into two divisions- i) 'Choto ami', (which is 'the self' and finite), and (ii) 'Baro ami', (which is regarded as 'the soul' and infinite). The 'Choto ami' confined within the self-interest, represents man's selfish works. On the other hand the 'Baro ami' finds expression in the vastsea of humanity through disinterested service to mankind. This aspect of man indicates his divinity, by which man enables to transform his selfish desire to selflessness. Apart from that, in another poem, "Gitali" he says that if God makes man alive, then his whole creation would be blessed. Tagore acknowledged the intimate relationship between man and Nature and also the interdependence of man and Nature on each other. However, this intimate relationship between man and Nature was not at all in conflict with the place of pride man occupied in the world scheme. Man's freedom and uniqueness were expressed in his creation. Even though Nature helped him to cross the limits of Nature and show his supremacy, he could

not separate himself from Nature. Tagore believed in man completely identifying himself with Nature, for it was only through Nature that the spirit could realize itself.

According to Tagore, it was the eye of an artist that was needed to perceive the inner relation of the objects of Nature. It was by contemplation of Nature that a man could derive divine inspiration. Nature was full of meaning, filled with indescribable music. The trees, the stars and the blue hills ache with a meaning which can never be uttered in words', says the poet.

From his extensive writings about the relation of man to nature, we discover that the experience of the world i.e., "Vishva-bodh' is not isolated from the experience of nature i.e., 'Prakriti bodh'. Along with her beauty and appeal, Nature's meaning and purpose were equally important to him.

At the end, if I looked on Sri Aurobindo writings, Aurobindo's concept of self is truly amazing. He conceives self as the 'immost being' and gives such a vivid description of its workings. This immost being or Psychie being, according to him, is the mere manifestation of the Brahman. In this way he beautifully draws a correlation of jivatman or Psychic being with that of Paramatman or God. Standing for beyond the reach of the ordinary mental consciousness of man, the Psychic being or self is actually the individual expression of divinity hidden within each human being. And this is the true essence of his theory concerning individual being.

Research Design:

It's a qualitative research and based on Content analysis and it will an evaluative in nature.

Data Collection:

1) Primary data : Related writings of Soren Aabye Kierkegaard, Mrtin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Karl Jaspers, Upanishads, Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo.
2) Secondary data: Related critically acclaimed and analytical writings from well known writers on Tagore and Jean Paul Sartre.

Objective:

1) To know about the Jean Paul Sartre's concept of self.
2) To know about the Rabindranath Tagore concept of self.
3) To know about the similarities and differences between Jean Paul Sartre's concept of self and Rabindranath Tagore's concept of self.
4) To know about the significance of Rabindranath Tagore's and Jean Paul Sartre's concept of self in modern era.
5) To know about what the Jean Paul Sartre can learn from Rabindranath Tagore or vice-versa.

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8) Jaspers, Philosophy of Existance, trans. Richard F. Grabau (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.
9) See Kurt Hoffman, "Basic Concepts of Jaspers' Philosophy," in The Philosophy of Karl Jaspers, 1999.

10) Hiranmaya Banerjee, How Thou Singest my Master, Calcutta: Orient Longmans, 1961.
11) Sankha Ghosh, Introduction, Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Poems, Sukanta Chaudhuri(Ed), New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.
12) See Martin Heidegger, Die Grundrobleme der Phanomenologie (Frankfurt Main, 1975).
13) Martin Heidegger, Sein und Zeit (Tubingen, 2006). In subsequent references to sein und Zeit the following abbreviations will be used: SuZ for the German edition, and BT for the English edition.
14) Dalal, A. S. (comp.), Our Many Selves: Practical Yogic Psychology: Selections from the Works of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 2001.